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Soviet Lies & CIA Intelligence: Did Saint John of Shanghai Recognize the Moscow Patriarchate?

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The history of the Russian Church Abroad and the Post-Bolshevik Church in Russia is an interesting but often buried one since a majority of the primary sources for it exist only in the Russian language and most people are not familiar with this language or how to do historical research. Because of this, writing is often skewed with a specific narrative that leans in one direction over the other. Some of my recent research revealed the uncovering of a historical letter concerning the father of Saint Philaret of New York, who was a Moscow Patriarchate Bishop named Archbishop Dmitry (Voznesensky), Metropolitan Anastassy (Gribanovsky), and Saint John of Shanghai that sheds some light on this history of the Russian Church.



Early Photo of Saint John of Shanghai

The letter I ran across is written by Archbishop Dmitry (Voznesensky) of the Moscow Patriarchate to Metropolitan Anastassy (Gribanovsky) the Second First-Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad in what seems like an attempt to persuade Metropolitan Anastassy to come into communion, or rather submission, to the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate. What is interesting about this letter is that it was written in 1946 and mentions Saint John of Shanghai a few times. According to Archbishop Dmitry, he states that he read in a public newspaper produced in Shanghai that Saint John allegedly believed that the “election” of Patriarch Alexei I of Moscow which took place on February 2nd, 1945, was legitimate and canonical. About Saint John he writes, “The elections and enthronement of Patriarch Alexei himself, you could say, finally reassured us. (Personally, I was greatly impressed by the interview from March 16, 1945, in the “Shanghai Dawn” newspaper, which I read in the office of Bishop John of Shanghai, where Bishop John categorically spoke in favor of the canonical nature of the election and enthronement of Metropolitan Alexei I, only dismissing the question of the subordination of the Far East to him.)” [1].

This letter which was written by Archbishop Dmitry on December 16th, 1946, comes only a year and ten-months after the so-called election of Patriarch Alexei I of Moscow which was done with the blessing of Joseph Stalin. We have to wonder is what Archbishop Dmitry saying true about Saint John of Shanghai, that he acknowledges the election of this so-called Patriarch as legitimate and canonical? To our knowledge it is possible, albeit only very briefly. Saint John of Shanghai was living at a time when communications were slow and when he had largely been out of contact with both those in Soviet Russia and with the Church Abroad.

At the time of this letter from Archbishop Dmitry, he states to Metropolitan Anastassy that he was currently within Moscow. So, we have to wonder was this letter, which was primarily written to the leader of the Russian Church Abroad in order to convince him to submit to the Moscow Patriarchate, written under the influence and at the direction of the Soviets? That is entirely possible as we know from multiple other sources concerning the Russian Church Abroad that the Soviets and the Moscow Patriarchate always had as its aim to bring the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia under its control.

That brings us back to the original question. Did Saint John accept the so-called election of Patriarch Alexei I of Moscow as legitimate and canonical? In short, yes. However, this commemoration was for a negligible amount of time. "In July of 1945 the Bishop's Council in Harbin decided to submit to the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow. It was amid these circumstances that St. John followed this decision and on August 24, 1945 published his Ukaz 650 concerning the commemoration of the name of Patriarch Alexis (Simansky) at the divine services.

About a month later St. John received a telegram from Geneva from the First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad with the message that the Synod [in Exile] is functioning. Then St. John restored the commemoration of his legitimate church authority in the person of Metropolitan Anastassy. I think he did this not without the support of many of his closest associates. At the same time, it seems to us, he realized that he had made a hasty decision in submitting to Patriarch Alexis. In his Explanatory Address to the Flock of Shanghai, Archbishop John clearly explains his reason for first commemorating the name of Patriarch Alexis at the divine services and then for restoring commemoration of his own hierarchy" [2]

However, from this point forward it is clear that Saint John of Shanghai *did not* recognize the Moscow Patriarchate as legitimate or canonical. In another document, published in 1947, that I recently discovered from the Central Intelligence Agency, which was constantly monitoring the activities of the Soviet-controlled bishop in Shanghai, Bishop Victor (Svyatin), their declassified intelligence report concerning Saint John of Shanghai and Victor (Svyatin) states that,



Huiren Russo-Chinese Primary School, Archbishop Victor (Svyatin Leonid Vichrovich) with clergy. 1951. Beijing

[Redacted] Note: See [Redacted] which refers to the jurisdictional dispute between Archbishops Viktor and John mentioned below. Archbishop Viktor, who is the Moscow-sponsored head of the Russian Orthodox Church in China, was elevated to the position of senior Archbishop in China, with the Archdiocese at Peiping, in 1933 by the Russian Orthodox Synod, which was at that time in exile in Yugoslavia. He collaborated conspicuously with the Japanese, and was decorated by the Japanese government. Archbishop John /Iona or Ioann/ is a Russian Archbishop in Shanghai who has refused to accept the Moscow Patriarch, and who recognizes only the authority of the primate of the Orthodox Church in the United States [ROCOR]. See also [Redacted] which reported Archbishop Viktor had received a permit to enter the USSR.

([Redacted] Notes: See [Redacted] which indicated that Archbishop Viktor planned to be in North China for several months in connection with the reorganization of the Peiping Russian Orthodox Mission.)

1. Activities of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Peiping are under the complete control of Tichvinsky. Acting Consul General of the USSR Consulate in Peiping. Upon his instructions, Archbishop Viktor has separated the clergy of the mission into three categories: Soviet clergy, Chinese clergy and non-Soviet [White Russian] Clergy. The last group has been excluded from the life and activities of the mission. All efforts are being made to indoctrinate the Chinese clergy with pro-Soviet sentiments.

2. Archbishop Viktor has decided to renew his attacks against the St. Seraphim Emigrants' Church in Tienstsin. He plans to make a certain emigrant, Budai or Bagat, head of the church, provided that he places the church under the jurisdiction of Archbishop Viktor rather than Archbishop John. Another plan [an alternative proposed by Viktor] is to appoint Father D. Shevnenko of the Peiping Orthodox Mission. Father Shevenko is a Chinese citizen who is on good terms with both Soviets and emigrants.

3. In view of the repatriation of Soviet citizens, the Tientsin Soviet clergy fear that they will soon be without funds, especially since the Orthodox community is divided into three parishes: Orthodox Emigrant, Chinese Missionary and Soviet. Archbishop Viktor has suggested that the parishes be combined to make two and that the rector of the Chinese Missionary Church agree to head the Moscow Patriarch Mission. This proposal has not met with the approval of Rev. Feodor DHU (TU), rector of St. Innokentii Church (? Chinese Missionary Church?). The Chinese Orthodox Clergy in Tientsin have lately become suspicious of the activities of the Peiping Orthodox Mission and Soviet officials. [Redacted] concerning DHU.] [3].

As we can see from this primary source document concerning the ongoings of Orthodox Church life in Shanghai during the late 1940's, it is clear that Saint John of Shanghai rejected the authority of the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate and that the Soviet government was, unquestionably and totally involved in influencing the decisions of the Moscow Patriarchate to include all levels of their clergy as shown by the activities of Viktor (Svyatin) who was himself a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad but later defected and apostatized to the Soviet Moscow Patriarchate in 1945. This document also in many aspects confirms the well-known fears of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia; that the so-called Moscow Patriarchate was not free and was, in fact, in league with the God-fighting Soviet regime.



CIA Document Archbishop Viktor Declassified.pdf

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Archbishop Dmitry to Met Anastasy 1946.pdf

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